

MCS PTO Meeting - In Person on Norwich Green
September 2, 2021

In attendance:

Gabrielle Zwain
Suzanne Regan
Bob Pape
Kate Vergas
Leah Fosco
Rebecca Reed
Stephanie Hamilton
Anna Connolly
Christina Aquila
Katie Osgood
Jenny Barba
Molly Riordan
Lisa Christie
Julie Clem
Kate Thatcher
Emily Meyers
Nicole Torres
Brie Swenson
Caroline Gollub
Emma Cottage

Meeting commenced at 7:07 pm

Welcome and Introductions

Welcome from Stephanie Hamilton. We went around the circle and introduced ourselves, who our kids are and what we've been doing to cope with the pandemic. Stephanie explained the role of the PTO as well as sharing the PTO fundraisers and events. Stephanie explained the newsletter will come out once a month. Stephanie will be responsible for updating the PTO website. Molly Riordan will be responsible for updating the PTO's Facebook page. Stephanie shared how to contact her and the role of class rep. Stephanie explained the parent directory and encouraged membership. Christina Aquila explained that the membership drive is our largest fundraiser and is used to fund grant programs.

Stephanie shared that the kindergarten outdoor gathering was a big success and thanked Alberto Rodriguez for organizing.

Stephanie shared that New Parent Night will be next Thursday September 9 from 6-7 pm in the Multipurpose room. It is adults only and masks are required. Stephanie thanked Katherine Navins and Suzanne Regan for organizing.

Stephanie shared that next Saturday, September 11 from 1-3 pm there will be a “New to Norwich Fair”. The Norwich Historical Society is hosting it with different community organizations planning to be in attendance.

Treasurer’s Report/Annual Budget - Christina Aquila

Christina introduced the budget - each person in attendance received a paper copy of the budget. Explained that we had \$21,000 in savings from previous years. She put together a net zero budget. Explained fundraising will determine how much we will do for grants. Christina shared that she will be updating the budget monthly and reporting on it at each meeting. Christina shared that if anyone has any questions, please let her know.

Bylaw Amendments - Stephanie Hamilton

Stephanie passed around bylaws to each attendee and explained what we’re updating. The bylaws have not been updated since 2000. To help guide them in updating the PTO bylaws, they used the PTO bylaws from a national organization that gives input. Most of the bylaws stay the same - there are just some small updates. Bylaws will be posted on the website for all to look at and then we will vote on them at the next meeting. Changes include the grant approval process and Stephanie, Christina, and Jessica Liddy worked together to create a purchasing process.

Annual Membership Dues Drive/Directory- Jessica Eakin

Stephanie gave an update, as Jessica couldn’t be there. Stephanie noted that Jessica has posted a request for all to join the directory updates on the list serve. We are doing OK with the directory so far and Jessica will continue to do more outreach.

Business Partners - Jenny Barba

Jenny explained the business partners program- for both relationship building and fundraising. Prefer donations are in monetary value (cash/check). Jenny was impressed with the willingness of local businesses to donate last year. We lost quite a few but also gained new so we approximately broke even last year. If anyone has ideas for businesses we should work with, please reach out to Jenny. We have different levels of business partners, based on how much businesses contribute. If anyone has ideas Jenny will put it in a google doc and share it. Jenny has verbally brought it up with many businesses and they have agreed to do it. Jenny asked about a banner- there was a banner in the past that was lost. Jenny thinks it is another way to add value for the businesses who do donate. Jenny will probably be looking into getting a new banner this year. Jenny clarified business doesn’t have to be in Norwich, can be in other towns.

Food Drives - Emily Bradley

Stephanie Hamilton gave an update as Emily Bradley couldn’t be in attendance. Food drive was very successful last year and Emily is planning to do the same event again. Emily will give an update at the next meeting.

Celebration Books- Erin Butler and Kari Cramer

Stephanie Hamilton gave an update as neither Erin nor Kari could be in attendance. Kari and Erin will work with the new librarian to have celebration books during COVID. Rebecca brought up that it did happen the previous year (2019), that kids chose books and not parents. The consensus was that this event will happen this year unless other additional concerns arise.

MCS Garden and Harvest Tasting - Molly Riordan

Due to ongoing COVID concerns, we won't have a harvest tasting this year. Molly shared that we had 6 or 7 years of doing harvest tasting and hope to return to it again in the future. The vegetables are grown by kids. In the past, some of the harvest is donated to Willing Hands and some of the harvest stays in the school and parents would make food and share it with the community at open house. That won't happen this year due to COVID but we will plan to do it next year. Molly shared that even though Harvest Tasting is not happening, the kids are still out in the garden. She shared that her first grader was eating vegetables from the garden. Molly shared that Lindsay keeps track of all food donated and gives a tally for how much we have donated to Willing Hands. We will have a tally at the next meeting.

Emma Cottage explained sugaring in February. Rebecca expressed that in the past parents made pancakes for the school but we aren't sure how that will play out this year due to COVID. Molly will talk to Lindsay to explore what we could do. A few parents had confusion over what was allowed for sharing food, for example- a birthday treat, due to COVID. Stephanie expressed that we should work to clarify the food policy.

Bike to School Day - Rebecca Reed

Oct 6

Rebecca shared that Bike to School happens twice a year. Last year we did grade ride (rather than just all ride down the streets). In two weeks Rebecca will recruit volunteers. Each grade will meet in different places and ride in. 6th grade starts and picks up each grade, making a train. Everyone gets to ride through town. Information will be coming. No police escort- there was not a police escort last year either because the route was switched to sidewalks. Jenny Barba volunteered to ask the fire department to help with traffic. Rebecca said coordination would go through police and will investigate further. Jenny expressed some safety concerns from last year and thought it might be helpful to have additional traffic help.

Spirit Wear- Lucy Rojansky

Stephanie gave update as Lucy couldn't be in attendance. Lucy reports that she is working hard on it. She is planning on opening up the spirit wear online store in September. Stephanie explained that you can buy MCS t-shirts and tote bags etc. and then the PTO gets a certain percentage of sales. There will be a Spirit Wear week and kids can wear their MCS gear. More info will be in newsletter.

Room Rep update - Rebecca Reed

More info will be in Crosswords, which will be coming on Friday. We should be all set by next week and then Rebecca will start asking Room Reps to start communicating to help drive information.

Additional comments:

Emma Cottage shared two items:

- She helped organize a coffee and conversation event at the middle school that was very successful. She has approached Shawn about doing it at MCS and he has agreed. More information will be coming. Rebecca Reed asked to pass on the feedback that it is helpful to have some events during non-working hours so that working parents may attend.
- Greg Bagnato asked Emma for two volunteers to help transport lunches from high school. Brie volunteered and many in attendance asked for more info. If more help is needed Emma will look into it.

Stephanie confirmed that our next meeting is Oct 7. We were planning on meeting outside on the lawn again, however it is now dark. It was agreed that we will meet an hour earlier from 6-7 pm to get more daylight, and then for the following meetings we will move to Zoom.

Molly Riordan- Molly shared that she knows many people have questions about outdoor time. She shared that the role of the PTO is to disseminate information and help where asked. One group outside of and separate from the PTO was created by concerned parents called the Outdoor Enthusiasts. This is a group of parents that are encouraging outdoor time and talking via email, going to school board meetings, etc. If anyone would like to join this group, they can email the PTO and Molly will pass their email to the Outdoor Enthusiast group.

Lisa Christie for school board - Lisa briefly explained the structure of the interstate school board system (ie, 4 school boards, 4 budgets, committees, etc). She clarified that if anyone has a concern, they should start with their child's teacher, then move to Shawn, then to Jay (the Superintendent). She also clarified that if you send an e-mail to the school board and you do not get a detailed response, it is not that the school board is not listening or does not care, it is that legally they cannot respond with more discussion because before discussing they must publicly announce that there will be a public discussion. An e-mail sent to the school board is considered public record. She explained that the Norwich School Board meetings are the first Wednesday of the month, are open to all and that you can find meeting minutes and information on the SAU website. In addition she explained that every school meeting has a section at the beginning called "public comment" where anyone in attendance can discuss anything that is not on the agenda. The Zoom component will be kept so anyone can call in vs. needing to be in person in attendance. Rebecca asked if the process for bringing concerns (ie, teacher/principal/superintendent/school board) was on the SAU website. Lisa will look into this.

Jenny Barba shared that she is a member of the Outdoor Enthusiast group and that the majority of the ideas they have brought concerning the outdoor area have been implemented. The teachers have been very grateful for all the help- there are outdoor chairs, hand washing stations, tents, etc. Teachers and staff appreciated the initiative of parents to implement these ideas independently, as they have much to focus on in terms of getting classroom ready, work with students.

There was a question asking if the Outdoor Enthusiast group has explored raising funds to fix the forest. It was clarified that the process will be a bit more complicated, involving an ADA approved contractor and because the forest is on town property it must go through the permitting process. Lisa shared that the School Board is on board and agrees the work needs to happen and that the best thing for concerned parents to do at this time would be to attend the Selectboard meeting to ensure that the town knows this is important to parents.

8:25 meeting adjourned.